THE PRESIDENCY/HUGH SIDEY

Seeking a Magical Vista

Nothing characterizes the presidency of Richard Nixon these days so much as the sense of perpetual motion. He moves from the Oval Office in the White House to his hideaway across the street to the deck of the yacht *Sequoia* on the Potomac, from Washington to Key Biscayne to Grand Cay in the Bahamas, from the Camp David mountaintop to the beaches of San Clemente.

The U.P.I.'s Eugene Risher, who accompanies the caravan, has calculated that up until last week the President had spent only three full days in Washington during August, and that only one night out of every three during his entire 4½ years in the presidency has been spent in the official residence.

The need for Presidents to travel is self-evident, but it can be asked whether motion is replacing substance. Nixon's recent cross-country swing was an engineered spectacle that started with his speech in the Oval Office, sped south to Florida, then on to New Orleans and the specially selected VFW audience, and came to rest by the Pacific. It was supposed to be a triumphal march from coast to coast, an antidote to Watergate. It failed because of Nixon's nervousness and because it was a hollow concept.

DIRCK HALSTEAD

ALOFT IN AIR FORCE ONE

Ever since John Kennedy, there has been this compulsion to fly off some place. There is something about being at 35,000 ft. that increases a President's sense of omnipotence. Kennedy's spirits visibly lifted when he got on his magic carpet. Lyndon Johnson's facial coloring improved as he swept skyward in his mad dashes round the world. Even when Nixon is earthbound in California, he often sets out for a spin along the roaring California freeways. The amateur psychologists who travel with Nixon insist that in part he is running from his problems, seeking some magical vista where solutions will appear. They never do.

One of the lures of presidential travel is the miracle of the machine itself. It is all so beautiful. From the fleet of jets and helicopters, through the limousines and boats, right down to the golf carts and snowmobiles, there is not another area of Government that works better.

The basic question is whether a President can really run the Government as he should when he is on the go as much as Richard Nixon. Presidents have angrily insisted that the essence of the White House travels with them and that they get more work done when they are beyond the physical White House. It may be true that they can answer all the mail and sign bills better once they are clear of Pennsylvania Avenue. But important matters cannot be resolved well by an itinerant President. Information is limited, the passion of arguments is lost when they are put down on paper, and the mood and feel of a crisis disappears in the tranquil havens of sun and water.

John Kennedy was cruising in Cape Cod waters when the Berlin Wall went up. He hurried home and did nothing. One wonders what might have happened had he been in Washington, his fingers on all the sensitive spots, his generals and diplomats around him. Courage tends to mount in such settings.

Certainly some of Watergate is rooted in Nixon's constant movement. If we are to believe the President, the failure was not a philosophical one but a mechanical one. While he was in his lofty retreats conceiving the grand designs for East-West détente and for revenue sharing, the people he left in charge of the White House were running amuck. Nixon, according to his own account, did not inquire what his aides were doing and did not sense the lawlessness and deceit that grew up around him. He was, among other things, gone too much.

Being President of the United States is not like being president of a corporation or a university, that is true. But there are elements of the job that require the same grubby, grinding attention to detail, to people, to events. If the men who contend for the White House fancy themselves above that kind of work, then perhaps the time has come to consider some kind of Executive Vice President with the duty to run the place as it should be run—from Washington.